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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: THE U.S. AND TAIWAN'S UN REFERENDUM

¶1. Summary: Taiwan's major Chinese and English language dailies on September 13th gave significant reporting and editorial coverage to U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Thomas Christensen's speech, which was delivered at the U.S.-Taiwan Defense Industry Conference in Annapolis Tuesday, September 11. Both the centrist, KMT-leaning "China Times" and the pro-unification "United Daily News," as well as the three English-language dailies -- "Taipei Times," "China Post," and "Taiwan News" -- all front-paged Christensen's comment on Taiwan's UN referendum. Several papers even carried excerpt translations of Christensen's speech on their inside pages, as well as the reactions by Taiwan's ruling and opposition parties. The centrist, KMT-leaning "China Times" ran a banner headline on page three that read "At this Sensitive Moment, Christensen Unveils the False Appearance of the UN Referendum."

¶2. In terms of editorials and commentaries, an editorial in the pro-independence "Liberty Times," Taiwan's biggest-circulation daily, said despite opposition from the United States, Taiwan will never stop its footsteps marching toward the UN. A separate "Liberty Times" analysis chimed in by saying Taiwan's democracy is not defined by the United States. An editorial in the pro-independence, English-language "Taiwan News" said Washington has failed to grasp the meaning of Taiwan's UN referendum. An op-ed in the pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" urged Taiwan to make the UN referendum an issue in the United States. An editorial in the mass-circulation "Apple Daily," however, said President Chen Shui-bian's push for the UN referendum is a move to ask for humiliation himself. An editorial in the pro-unification "United Daily News" sought to interpret Christensen's speech from the U.S. perspective and concluded that the United States believes Chen is the betrayer of Taiwan's interests. An editorial in the conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" called the recent remarks by the U.S. officials "a blow to the DPP's referendum campaign." End summary.

A) "Taiwan Will Never Stop Halfway Its Footsteps Marching towards the UN"

The pro-independence "Liberty Times" [circulation: 720,000] editorialized (9/13):

"... Christensen's speech can be viewed as the most straightforward illustration of the U.S. policy toward Taiwan over the past few years. He not only rebutted the various recent remarks by the Bian administration over the UN referendum but also explained the United States' Taiwan policy in the clearest manner. It is obvious that following this speech, Washington's Taiwan policy has taken on a complete shape, and there will no longer be room for ambiguity. It remains to be seen and estimated as to what impact this move by the U.S. government will have on the future development of the cross-Strait situation. But Christensen's key argument was evidently built on a seriously flawed premise, which must be clarified and corrected here, so that people in the world will understand the whole story, Taiwan's inferior situation and where

the truth and justice lie. This way they will not have any misunderstanding of the justified appeal of the Taiwan people's UN referendum and regard the victim Taiwan as a troublemaker.

"An analysis of Christensen's speech showed that there are two main arguments: First, the UN referendum has stepped on China's red line, so Taiwan is provoking China, which has affected regional peace and stability. Second, Christensen has drawn a line between the Taiwan people and the Bian administration and regards the UN referendum as President Chen's ploy to manipulate the campaign by violating the Four No's pledge. Both arguments contain serious errors. First, the UN referendum is designated to safeguard the cross-Strait status quo, enabling the status quo of 'China and Taiwan are each a country on one side [of the Taiwan Strait]' to be confirmed by the international community through [Taiwan's] participating in organizations like the UN. Taiwan was originally an independent sovereign country, and its participation in the UN is an essential part to turn it into a normal country. It is not that Taiwan will become independent because it joins the UN. The referendum therefore will not alter the status quo. ... Besides, regarding the red line on cross-Strait issues, why is it not drawn according to the principle of reciprocity and mutual trust among Washington, Beijing and Taipei and a consensus reached by respecting the existing reality, but set unilaterally by China? Would it really meet the U.S. interests if the red line across the Taiwan Strait is defined by China, which constrains Taiwan and forces it to tilt toward China? ...

"Second, even though the UN referendum has been promoted by the Bian administration, it has solicited over 70 percent of public support, which indicated that the UN bid is Taiwan's mainstream public opinion. The fact that the [island's] nativist regime raised this UN referendum was to address the public request, and it cannot possibly dominate such a movement. ...

"The United States is a solid ally of Taiwan, and both sides share common political and economic interests and the core values of democracy. As a result, even though the Bush administration has more than once expressed opposition to the UN referendum - something that the Taiwan people feel sorry about, nevertheless it will not affect our friendship, nor will it weaken the Taiwan people's determination to join the UN. In other words, the Taiwan people can understand Washington's worry about China taking reckless moves, but they will not stop halfway their footsteps marching toward the UN.
..."

B) "Taiwan's Democracy Is not Defined by the United States"

Deputy Editor-in-Chief Tsou Jiing-wen noted in the pro-independence "Liberty Times" [circulation: 720,000] (9/13):

"... It is Washington's choice, based on U.S. national interests, to follow China's request to command Taiwan. Taiwan can only feel sorry about it. But, [in the remarks by] Thomas Christensen, and other people like John Negroponte and Dennis Wilder, there is a error in their premise: The right to determine whether Taiwan needs a referendum does not lie in the 'Taiwan leaders,' but the Taiwan people who have the right to vote. ...

"The United States must come up with convincing reasons if it wants to negotiate with the Taiwan people to revoke such a proposal. If Washington fails to put itself in Taiwan's shoes, simply elaborates to Taiwan by unilaterally and forcefully pouring the Chinese definition and U.S. interests on the island, and asks Taiwan to cut off its own interests, the final result will be the same even if it is President George W. Bush who personally reads out the imperial decree from Beijing. All the moves will only add fuel to the fire.
..."

"Thus, Christensen has worried too much when he said the United States will not allow Taipei to decide the U.S. position. Taiwan has never had such arrogance as to believe it is the master of the world. But the sentence 'Taiwan will not allow the United States and China to determine its position' is something that the Taiwan people want to give back to Christensen."

C) "Washington Fails to Grasp Meaning of U.N. Referenda"

The pro-independence, English-language "Taiwan News" [circulation: 20,000] editorialized (9/13):

".... We believe Christensen's speech again shows the inability of Washington policy makers to perceive why the DPP government is intent on proposing this initiative and what is actually at stake. This blindness results in part from Christensen's premise that Washington 'does not recognize Taiwan as a state,' a position that contradicts the realities that Taiwan has achieved all of the qualifications of a self-governing 'state.' Claiming that most Taiwan citizens accept our exclusion from the international community as 'a fact of life,' Christensen also neglects the fact that although opinion polls show majority support for maintaining the 'status quo,' our people have a rather different definition of our current status than posited by Washington, as shown by the survey of 1,068 Taiwan adults released by the Taiwan Thinktank in early September that showed 76 percent believe "Taiwan is a sovereign and independent state" separate from the PRC.

"Christensen ignores the fact that Washington already officially uses the name 'Taiwan' in the Taiwan Relations Act and other contexts, but seems to imply that we should remain content with the "Republic of China" moniker even though it cannot be used outside of our borders. Washington fails to appreciate that most of our 23 million people believe that they merit equal treatment with the rest of the world's people and a proper role as a developed and democratic state in the world community. Christensen's military definition of 'strength' is also gravely naive as the fundamental factor in the ability of a nation to defend itself from aggression or annexation is precisely its sense of national cohesion and unity. The effort by the DPP government to consolidate and deepen Taiwan's democracy in the face of the military and diplomatic threat posed by the PRC is therefore no less critical to Taiwan's security than the arms procurement from the U.S.

"Both referenda are therefore key democratic processes toward the formation of a consensus on national identity that is absolutely essential for the defense of Taiwan's survival as an independent democratic state and are not 'unnecessary provocations.' Christensen also ignores Washington's hefty contributions to the current crisis through its support of Beijing's resolution in the Paris-based World Animal Health Society in late May that reduced Taiwan's status from a full member to a 'non-sovereign regional member' and defined Taiwan as part of the PRC, and by its tardiness in objecting to the statement in late March by U.N.

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon that 'for the purposes of the United

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Nations, Taiwan is an integral part of the PRC.'

"These developments marked a major unilateral change in Taiwan's status in the international community, already being pushed by the PRC, that has 'provoked' President Chen's formal application to join the U.N. under the name of 'Taiwan' as a defensive move to uphold the status quo of Taiwan's autonomous identity from the PRC. Christensen's assumption that Taiwan's security is not threatened so long as Taiwan 'behaves' in the face of PRC threats to squeeze Taiwan's international space would assume that Taiwan's people should put 'blind faith' for their security in the U.S. We cannot afford to be so naive."

D) "Make the Referendum an Issue in the US"

Michael Lin, a political commentator, opined in the pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" [circulation: 30,000] (9/13):

".... The US of course feels that putting pressure on Taiwan is the most simple and effective way to preserve stability in the Taiwan Strait. Can the US really afford to boss Taiwan around like this? Does it really not need Taiwan's strategically advantageous geographic position to protect its own interests? Now that Taiwan is in a situation where it holds a lot of bargaining chips, the first thing it should do is change its diplomatic [sic] toward the US from being the weak party and nodding in agreement to everything the US says, to loudly and bravely telling the US the wrongs of its

"one China" policy and pointing out why this policy is not beneficial to the US. ...

"The two sides of the Strait aren't able to resolve their conflicting opinions as long as the US maintains its policy of keeping the issue of Taiwan's sovereignty unclear. This is the fuse that might set off the powder keg that is the situation in the Taiwan Strait, and that is the dilemma facing the US. Moreover, Taiwan should use the problem of North Korea to improve its international circumstances and influence the upcoming presidential elections in the US. US President George W. Bush has already been reduced to a lame duck. Taiwan should take advantage of the referendum issue to spark serious debate about the position of Taiwan in the US.

"Through US organizations that sympathize with Taiwan, think tanks and the power of public opinion, the Taiwanese government should make Taiwan a major international issue during the US presidential election campaign. ... It should urge the future leaders of the US that the best strategy for them in Asia is to correct or change their old 'one China' policy. This way, Taiwan can turn defeat into victory, and create a favorable space for Taiwan to enter the UN with the support of the US."

E) "Taiwan Asking for Humiliation Itself"

The mass-circulation "Apple Daily" [circulation: 530,000] editorialized (9/13):

"U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Thomas Christensen harshly criticized that the UN referendum is a move to change [Taiwan's] national name. ... Washington, in terms of its policy, has drawn a line between Bian and the Taiwan people. It supports Taiwan but not Bian; it supports Taiwan's democracy and freedom but opposes Taiwan independence. It needs a strong and moderate Taiwan but not one that provokes its superior neighbor. ... Bian is clearly aware of the U.S. difficulties but it has consistently put the United States on a short leash, playing it indirectly as an ethnic card for campaigning purposes. How can the United States not get piqued up? What A-Bain has been doing is like asking for humiliation himself!"

F) "U.S. Perspective: Chen Shui-bian Is the Betrayer of Taiwan's Interests"

The pro-unification "United Daily News" [circulation: 400,000] editorialized (9/13):

"If one wants to come up with a core perspective after a close reading of U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Thomas Christensen's comment on the 'UN referendum,' it will be: the United States believes that Chen Shui-bian is a betrayer of Taiwan's interests. To extend such an interpretation, one can say that the United States believes that Taiwan independence is the betrayer of Taiwan's interests, and that the DPP which advocates Taiwan independence is also the betrayer of Taiwan's interests. ...

"The three officials speaking on behalf of the U.S. government have more than once emphasized 'the American people's friendship and commitment for the 'Taiwan people.' The three officials remarked repeatedly that the 'Taiwan interests' referred to by the United

States are the real 'Taiwan interests,' while in the meantime they implied that Chen is actually the betrayer of the 'Taiwan interests.' It is akin to telling the Taiwan people that at this critical moment, they should make a judgment and choice between the United States and Chen, in terms of which one has correctly interpreted and maintained the Taiwan interests. ..."

G) "A Blow to the DPP's Referendum Campaign"

The conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" [circulation: 30,000] editorialized (9/13):

"... The U.S. has been the staunchest ally of Taiwan in the island's attempt to defend itself from a possible attack from the other side of the Taiwan Strait. The Chen government has kept condemning the mainland for deploying hundreds of missiles along the southeast

coast of China, targeting Taiwan. In fact, if the DPP were less eager to make Taiwan an independent state, there would not be so many missiles on the mainland coast across from the island. Whether the DPP will win the upcoming presidential election is anyone's guess, but the party has damaged relations between Taiwan and the U.S."

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